



The South India CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

MAY 1995

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"GIVE ME LIFE IN THY WAYS" Psalms 119 : 37



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MAY 1995

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25 Years Ago!!

The layman in the World

There is the layman in the world. What is his connection with the Church? The layman is the most important, the most numerous and the most neglected by the church! In this group are to be found the industrial workers in town, the farm labourers in the villages, the intellectuals etc. These are the church's representatives in the spheres, where the serve, and where minister or the paid worker is not welcome or effective. He is the unused ambassador of the Church and the potential evangelist of the Faith.

— Churchman 1957

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Round Table Meeting on State of the Church in Andhra Pradesh



ORGANISED BY ANDHRA PRADESH CHRISTIAN COUNCIL

The church is at cross roads. It is losing its characteristics of being salt, light and leaven. The Ministry for which it has been called remains unfinished, if not forgotten. Its cutting edges of mission have become blunt. How it is going into the 21st Century in this totally unprepared and ill-equipped manner? How best it can serve the country without losing its spiritual identity? How it can redeem itself from the ills like corruption, nepotism, bribery and present itself pure before the seat of the judgement?

It is precisely these questions that were discussed at the first ever convened Round Table meeting held at the American Studies Research Centre, located in the Osmania University Campus, Hyderabad, on 14th and 15th of February 1995. Dr. J.A. Oliver, the Treasurer APCC who organised the meeting, left no stone unturned to make it a successful venture.

Prof. K. Rajaratnam, the Master of the Senate of Serampore, who was invited by the A.P.C.C., to deliver the keynote address, went for the church hammer and tongs.

Church which ought to be a seat of light and guidance has turned into a hot bed of intrigue. The church government has become a clone of the governments outside it. Slanging, mud-slinging, black mailing have become the stock-in-trade of the people of the Church, he opined.

Dwelling on the critical analysis of the performance and the state of affairs of the church, Prof. Rajaratnam touched upon vital issues which have been rocking the church.

The selfless missionaries who had laboured hard all over the state left vast properties while leaving. The properties are fast disappearing. The woeful fact is that these properties even being sold to finance the never-ending law suits or, worse, for purely personal needs of the selfish leaders who somehow managed to come to power.

Millions of rupees of the church are being spent on court cases by some of the leaders only to protect their positions and preserve their seats. How many parsonages, orphanages, schools, homes might be set up if this waste and embezzlement is plugged.

To say that corruption is growing in church would be putting it mildly. Nepotism, favoritism, bribery are glaring. Worst of all it breaks one's heart to see that huge offering of church-goer being spent on litigations, 'adjustments' for personal aggrandizement of the leaders.

Church politics is a strong factor for the disunity. People who do not toe the official line have no say and they do not matter. And there are church cabinet reshuffles everytime a party is out or in. Vexed with such exploitative politics and squabbles, many people break away from the mother church. Many mainline churches are losing their members to little known groups.

The sad fall out of the cast iron prejudices if what may be called "splintering syndrome". The explosion of the new churches which, by the way, has long since ceased to shock, can be matched with the various social categories. In fact caste which has no place in the church, ideally speaking, is splitting church and destroying it.

Another factor for the decline of the church is barring women from the pulpit and from the sacerdotal duties. There are confident and committed women waiting to work and play the hard role of leading the flock but the church's response has been discouraging.

After the analytical study Prof. Rajaratnam suggested an agenda for action to the churches:—

- ♣ to initiate an indepth study to find out ways and means to build up community.
- ♣ to improve the institutions which come under the tutelage of churches.

- ♣ to lend helping hand to the development ministry.
- ♣ to promote the activities of peace and justice at the local congregation level.

The sound and the fury of his presentation had diminished once he, rather emphatically declared that the church is the answer to the issues and problems which are being confronted by the downtrodden.

Following up the keynote address, Bishop Jonathan, the Vice-President of the N.C.C.I., Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, the General Secretary, N.C.C.I., Rev. Dr. Dass Babu, Ft. Abraham Oommon NCCI, Mr. Joseph John, CASA, Madras and Rev. Deenabandu, Madras, offered their own assessment of the Church's performance. While agreeing with Prof. K. Rajaratnam for the most part especially when he had pin pointed certain flaws in the church, they strongly felt that all was not lost and that there is hope for the church to revive itself and keep faith glowing.

Rev. Dr. K. Nathaniel, President, A.P.C.C., Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar. Irenaeus, President, NCCI chaired the meetings on two days.

Rev. Prasanna Kumari, Executive Secretary, U.E.L.C. and Bishop F.C. Jonathan shared the word of God.

Getting leaders of various denominations to speak from one platform is unuphill task. Dr. J.A. Oliver did a fine job of it from start to finish. On the second day with the help of Mr. Ramachandra Rao the Advocate, General A.P., he led the invitees, the other leaders, specially four bishops of the Catholic Church, a hundred in all, to the Chief Minister Mr. N.T. Rama Rao, to submit an appeal to grant to the Christians of Scheduled caste origin the same privileges that are being enjoyed by the S.C. people. Mr. N.T. Rama Rao received the appeal. He spent more than thirty minutes with the delegates. A prayer for the welfare of the people of A.P. was offered by Bishop Joseph Mar. Irenaeus and a Bible was presented by Rev. Prakasam (Bible Society).

It takes very little for the church to right itself if all the leaders do a bit of soul-searching and brace themselves up for the task of purging. Each and every member of the church should pitch in and work hard to make the church relevant and make it shine in the dark as it did, a beacon and hope of the nation.

— DASS BABU

* * * * *

US Methodist churches to consider merger of 14 million members

New York, 5 May (ENI) — Bishops from four Methodist denominations in the United States have agreed to ask their top legislative bodies to set up a commission to explore the possible merger of their four churches and draw up a plan of union.

The merger of the churches would create an organisation of more than 14 million Christians in 50 000 congregations.

More than 50 bishops of the United Methodist Church (UMC), the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) reached what one CME bishop called an "historic vote" towards unity during meetings late last month in Austin, Texas.

Realising that the merger may not occur for some years, three of the four denominations agreed to consider the proposal at their general conferences next year. The CME will consider it in 1998.

American Methodism began in 1784 when the Methodist Episcopal Church was founded, but a dozen years later the AMEZ Church was begun when dissatisfied blacks left a New York congregation because of restrictions in public worship, failure to ordain clergy and other issues. The group formally broke away from the mother denomination in 1820.

An incident in Philadelphia in 1787, when a former slave was forced to move to the balcony during prayer, sparked the beginnings of the AME Church, which became official in 1816.

In an effort to meet the needs of blacks in the South after the American Civil War, dissenters founded the CME in Tennessee in 1870.

Laughter's Healing Art

A person's faith is tested at life's crises. How one responds in such situations is the measure of one's spirituality and the depth of rootedness in Christ. As Paul says, under tribulation, one may be knocked down, but grace never allows being knocked out. (2 Cor. 9:6)

Among the senior Bishops in the C.S.I. I always had an affinity of spirit with Bishop Shettian. He had managed a diocese under very difficult circumstances and I had held him high for his managerial prudence. He is also known as the Bishop of jokes among the CSI Bishops. In any discussion of any problem in any committee he would come up with a story. His stories are not intended to suggest a solution to the problem at hand, but they often ease a tense situation. His Namboodiri jokes are well remembered and repeated. Sometimes, I must confess, I was bored or annoyed at his style of trivialising a serious discussion by a joke. Any way, from the day I got to know him I loved him, and I like him for his joviality and light heartedness.

I myself enjoy listening to jokes and telling them, though not so successfully as Bishop Shettian. "Save us, O Lord, from long faced saints", says a poster in my collection. Too much seriousness, false or genuine, doesn't become of saints. Laughter opens up hearts and mouths; laughter is health, laughter is healing.

The ability to laugh with others removing the unholy masks one wears and the capacity to laugh at oneself, not taking oneself too seriously are marks of saintliness and goodness, indeed our humanness. I wonder if animals can laugh at themselves, or laugh at all.

Bishop Ambalavanar is another person who has a fund of jokes. He jokes on the bishops; A Bishop saw a child playing with mud and asked, "what are you doing?" The child replied, "I am building a cathedral". "A cathedral must have a bishop", the Bishop suggested. "Yes, but I do not have enough muck to make a bishop" was the innocent child's honest reply.

To come back to the hero of this reflection, the Bishop had sometime ago developed gangren though a small wound in his foot. A lower leg had to be amputated. A cause for physical and mental trauma for any ordinary person. But in that state, the bishop chaired or participated in meetings in the hospital room. He kept himself so

cheerful and alert; He told his jokes too. The illness adorned him with an aura of humility and vulnerability, but also audacious courage and firm determination. He must be an amazing person of faith, courage and hope, I said to myself, an aspect of his life which I had overlooked till then.

He was first moving around with crutches, which he doesn't need any more. I was tempted to joke with him, "Bishop, can the CSI be able to walk around with out its economic crutches from out side and its legal crutches from inside"? He would have said, "Yes Bishop, If I am managing it, the CSI also should be able to do so".

I share this reflection with the readers, because these days bishopric is under much attack. They are critiqued for being inefficient administrators and unscrupulous manipulators. Certain idiosyncracies of some of them may warrant such unkind words. I myself often am very harsh on my own tribe. But I would like the reader also to know of the faith and courage, prayerfulness and straight forwardness of some bishops, hidden to people who little know of the mental and spiritual agonies of this office. And the share of human suffering they have like any one else, but with much higher visibly. Forgive me for this my defence of the *episcopoi*. Do have a real laughter at their expense, but also say a prayer, for their well-being and ministry.

The thought of this article came to me when we were recently singing the hymn "Let us accept each other as Christ accepted us" at family prayer in our home. I was reminded of the phrase, that I love very much; 'Laughter's healing art'. The Bishop's laughter must have definitely speeded up his healing.

The last verse of the hymn is as follows:

Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved,

In living situations to do the truth in love;

To practice your acceptance until we know by heart

The table of forgiveness and *laughter's healing art*.

May this art of laughter, this gift of grace and forgiveness, bring healing to all of us.

— SAM AMIRTHAM
Bishop

The Leadership of Jesus and our own: The Challenge

Reading : Mark 9, 1-8

HIS GRACE MOST REV. GEORGE CAREY, *The Archbishop of Canterbury**

1. CONTEXT OF READING (Mark 8, 31-38)

Five things to notice:

1. Jesus continues to preach the theme of the king who would suffer to his disciples, and he prepared them by foretelling his death.

One of the important features of leadership is that communications should be understood. "He made this very clear to them" (the theme of the Communication of Jesus could be developed).

2. The second is that Jesus as leader will not be swayed from his decision at the rebuke of Peter.
3. "Belittling" is a very powerful way of "put down" which a leader must deal with sternly and so Jesus deals with Peter. He speaks the hard word as necessary. It is interesting that Peter himself speaks the hard word in his speeches in Acts.
4. The Challenge of Jesus for his disciples is for them to be personally committed to the same task as he was, to take up the Cross and to follow him (I understand that to take up a Cross to the Arab means to strike camp, to pull up the tent pole and to be on the move).
5. Jesus the leader offers the sense of values and the realisation of priorities.

What is there here for us to consider in our ministry as bishops?

1. How clear are we in our preaching, teaching, and in our communications generally?
2. How firm are we in our decisions, without being harsh?
3. Are we prepared to speak the hard word, but with sensitivity?
4. Do we challenge and yet take people with us?

5. Do we get our own priorities right, and help others to do the same?

6. Do we make our priests and people feel that our faith is worthwhile?

¹And then he went on to say: "Remember this! There are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power."

²Six days later Jesus took Peter, James and John with him, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. As they looked on, a change came over him,³ and his clothes became very shining and white; nobody in the world could clean them as white. ⁴Then the three disciples saw Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Peter spoke up and said to Jesus: "Teacher, it is a good thing that we are here. We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say. ⁷A cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my own dear Son—listen to him!" ⁸They took a quick look around but did not see anybody else; only Jesus was with them.

What signs of leadership do we find in this reading?

1. Jesus indicates the need of the leader is to find space — to go away from it all into a remote place (as now in a Quiet Day) without feeling guilty or that there might be something better to do.
2. There is the need of the leader to have support at high points in ministry as well as low (cf. the Garden of Gethsemane). There is always the danger of being accused of having favorites, but it is important for the leader to have friends.
3. There is the need of being able to share experiences with others — those leaders who make all the decisions themselves are not leaders but dictators.
4. There is a succession in leadership — Jesus fulfils the line Moses (the law), and Elijah (the Prophets).

* This is the second address of the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered at the retreat organised for the CSI Bishops at Madras.

5. The fact that Peter is present indicates that Jesus affirms him even though he had rebuked him. (this is a token of Jesus' trust in others eg. Peter and Thomas, who needed second and more chances—a theme which can be developed).
 6. There is Jesus' own need for affirmation, as indicated by the voice (cf. the Baptism).
 7. There is temptation to stay on the spiritual level—to rest on the mountain top (cf. following the episode on the plain with the epileptic boy).
- In this short exposition of scripture questions are raised about the maintenance of our own ministries.
1. There is the matter of our own prayers lives; retreats, the development of our spirituality, and the ability to rest.
 2. There is the question of our willingness to accept support and to have friends.
 3. There is the question of delegation, the asking of advice and the value of consultation.
 4. There is the question of discernment in carrying on the worthwhile policies of our predecessors rather than wanting to stamp everything with our own marks.
 5. There is the restoration of those who have failed.
 6. There is the admission of our need of affirmation not least that we are loved by God.
 7. There is the temptation to live in two worlds. To remain in the realms of the spiritual — to stay in the safe rather than face the challenge of the Gospel in the world, or to be in the world without regard to spirituality.



Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholics try to bridge differences

Moscow, (ENI) — Talks held last week between the Vatican and the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church marked an important step towards Christian reunification by reducing "mutual misunderstandings and feelings of distance" between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, according to a senior Vatican official.

Orthodox representatives have also welcomed the meeting as pointing to the settlement of long-running disputes over the role of Roman Catholics in the former Soviet Union.

"I think we made some progress during the meeting," Cardinal Edward Cassidy told a Russian Roman Catholic news agency, *Istina i Zyzn* (Truth and Life).

"Real dialogue on issues currently causing Catholic-Orthodox misunderstanding is very important for the wider unity of Christians. This makes the open, friendly atmosphere of our latest talks particularly significant," Cardinal Cassidy said.

The cardinal, who chairs the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was speaking after two days of talks in Moscow's Danilov Monastery with a Russian Orthodox delegation led by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk. The restitution of church properties seized by the Soviet state, and proposed Russian legislation on religious freedom were reportedly among subjects discussed.

A Moscow Patriarchate statement after the meeting said that both sides had "expressed satisfaction" with steps taken to resolve "conflicts and misunderstandings" since their last meeting in Geneva in March 1994, and had looked for the "best means" of dealing with "complicated cases" in Russia and other ex-Soviet republics.

Life and Mission of the Church

REV. DR. GNANA ROBINSON, Bangalore

"... they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world..."

John 17:14

"As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

John 17:18

Life: Life of Conformity or Life of Confrontation

Yesterday I received a communication in the Post on the subject: "Hunger strike until death in regard to the misappropriation of funds about 25 crores in the last few years." A few days ago I received a telegraphic news. "Church Council removed Bishop..." "Goondas brutally assaulted Secretary." Every other day, we receive news such as this from various parts of the country.

The life of churches all over the country appears to be plagued with all types of evils — corruption, misappropriation, caste conflicts, power struggle and the like. Some of heads of churches seem to take pride in claiming that they have so many court cases filed by members of their churches, some claim 52 cases, some 60 and so on.

What is the life and witness of such a Church? Does it radiate the love of Christ? No! We are distressed and pained at such a dark reality of the Church which in reality is also the reality of the world in which we live.

The world in which we live is a corrupt world, a dark world, a world of exploitation and oppression. A world of injustice, which leaves no room for the weaker sections the marginalised, the dalits, the tribals, the poor. The news of "Fire in the slums in Bangalore" appear often in papers these days. Slums have no place in big cities like Bangalore and setting fire to the same appears to be an easy way of evicting the people and removing the slums out of the city. This is a world which is hostile to the poor and the weak. But is this totally a new situation? Was the world ever better? No!

The world has always been like this. It has always been a sinful world. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God", says St. Paul (Romans 3:23). Sin has

been there in the world right from the beginning of human history. It is the message of the Bible that along with sin God's grace continues to work towards salvation, the salvation of the poor and the weak.

Using modern terminology, "Sin" may be replaced with a number of words — corruption, manipulation, injustice, exploitation, discrimination and oppression. We live in a world of sin, world of oppression, world of exploitation. But where is the Church? Should the Church be a part of this sinful world? Should the Church adopt the ways of the world and act and live in the way the world lives? The Church is Ecclesia, the called-out-community, the community that is summoned for a specific purpose, the specific purpose of God's grace and salvation, salvation of this sinful world.

What is (should be) the relationship of this Church to this world? Should it be one of conformity or confrontation?

The temptation is obviously to conform to the ways of the world. There are many people who believe that as Christians we cannot have a different way of life. When I was at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary as Principal, I used to persuade our students not to have elections as in the world, but to evolve some method of choosing their leaders which will not divide people and promote groupism and hostility. But many used to argue that we are in the world and we cannot get away from the ways of the world. But, is it necessary that we follow the ways of the world.

Jesus in the High Priestly prayer says,

"they are not of the world even as I am not of this world."

John 17:17

Seeing the power struggle among his disciples, Jesus says to his disciples,

You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and that their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you.

Mark 10:43.

"You are in the world, still not of the world."

"The world acts and behaves in such a way — dominating and oppressing fellow men and women. But it shall not be so among you."

These are the words of Jesus, which clearly indicates that the Church is called out not to conform to the world but to confront the world on the question of sin — corruptions, exploitation, manipulation and oppression.

The life of Jesus was out and out a life of confrontation, a life of confrontation against the forces of sin, against the forces of death.

The Son of Man came to save the sinners and, in order to save sinners, he had to confront the forces of sin.

As we review the life of the Church of South India and other Churches in India, this is one basic question we have to ask. Do we want the Church to conform to the ways of the world or confront against the sinful ways of the world.

At the moment, we see the Church conforming more and more to the ways of the world. That is why, we hear news of 25 crores misappropriation, goondas assaulting secretary, Bishops being removed etc. It is high time that we look at the nature and calling of the Church. The Church is a called-out community; it has a special ministry, the ministry of salvation, the ministry of liberation.

Mission : A Militant Cross or a Suffering Cross:

"Mission" is a word which has been resented to by many Christians in the so-called Missionary Churches in the former colonial countries, because the so-called "mission" of Western Christianity went hand in gloves with the colonial expansion of the West. Besides, this word originally belonged to the military vocabulary. The Israelites spoke of the Entebbe Mission, When the Israelites were hi-jacked in Entebbe in Uganda. They sent their special squad of soldiers and liberated the people who were held as hostages. Similarly, America could speak of Grenada Mission, when they sent their army to Grenada, killed the President of Grenada and took that tiny Island under their control.

However, since this word has become so rooted in Christian usage and since we are not able to find a better word, we have to live with it, but we should recapture its original content and vision. The Bible talks of "sending", the sending of the Church. The Church which is called out of the world to be with Jesus, the Saviour, is sent

back into the world to be the instrument of God's salvation. This is what is meant by "mission" today. The purpose of the sending of the Church is the same as God's sending of His son into the world:

"As thou didst send me into the world,
So I have sent them into the world."

The Church of South India gives due importance to mission. Many Diocese recruit missionaries and send them to different parts of India. Next Sunday I am called to dedicate two young men as missionaries under the auspices of the National Missionary Society. All these are good, but we have to ask the fundamental question, "What is the content and purpose of the Church's Mission." Is it to change people from one religion to another religion, in our case, to Christianity, which is as corrupt as any other religion, and work towards the numerical growth of the Church? This was definitely not the purpose of Jesus' sending.

Jesus was definitely opposed to proselitization in the sense of conversion from one religion to another religion, when he said,

"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

Matthew 23:15

Jesus' sending is a sending for salvation, it is a mission to bring people out of darkness, "to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

(Luke 4:18)

We should also review our approach in doing our mission, or our method of doing mission. Our final year B.D. students conduct one morning worship before they leave. This year, they conducted the worship on our lawn and they enacted a skit in the place of the sermon. The scene was one of social oppression. Here they presented Jesus with his different faces — a passive Jesus who could not bring about a solution, a submissive and peaceful Jesus who too could not bring about a solution, and Jesus with several other faces, which were also equally ineffective. Finally, they presented a militant Jesus with a raised fist as the solution! In a similar vein spoke Dr. Hyung Kyung Chung, when she spoke to our community last year — a militant struggle as the way to our mission.

The option before us is — a militant cross or a suffering cross. The tendency in the Indian Church seems to be to opt for a militant cross.

Some years back, when there was religious tension in Kanyakumari, the Hindus staged a show of strength by gathering a large crowd to demonstrate against Christians. Immediately, the Christians also wanted to demonstrate their strength. They invited a popular Christian faith-healer and organised a meeting to counteract the Hindus, by demonstrating their numerical strength and power. The result was that eleven Christians were shot dead in the conflicts that come out subsequently.

This seems to be the tendency in India. The Indian church which suffers under minority complex, tries to use its prestigious institutions — schools, colleges and hospitals

as the means of its strength. Consequently, these institutions which once served the purpose of God's salvation, are now abused and they have now become "dens of robbers", brooding all the evils in the society.

The Church today is confronted with the same options that were placed before Jesus — the Sword or the Cross. Jesus asked Peter to put the sword back into its sheath and marched towards the Cross.

The Church in doing its mission today, is it prepared to follow the way of its Master, and walk on the way of the Cross? The Life and Mission of our Church depend very much on our answer to this question. — Amen.



Saudi Arabia tops list of states where Christians face repression

Strasbourg, France, 26 May (ENI) — Christians in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, the Comoros Islands (near Madagascar) and China face severe restrictions on their religious liberty, according to an international survey by a church-sponsored organisation, *Portes Ouvertes*, based in Strasbourg.

According to the 1995 list on religious liberty, published by *Portes Ouvertes* in May, Saudi Arabia's Christians face by far the most stringent restrictions on their religious liberty.

Hans Ucko, Executive secretary for inter-religious relations for the World Council of Churches (WCC), which has 324 member churches around the world, said in Geneva that while churches should always be "in solidarity" with Christians, particularly when they were facing persecution, the publication of lists could in fact have the wrong effect, increasing the difficulties faced by Christians in some countries.

Portes Ouvertes, Using an index with a possible maximum of 100 for total religious repression, estimated Saudi Arabia at 86 points, Iran at 75, Sudan at 73.5, the Comoros at 70, China at 68, North Korea and Qatar at 65, Oman at 64 and Libya at 63.

The index is based on 25 different criteria — with a maximum of four points each — including the country's constitution, the attitude of the authorities to Christians, and the liberty of churches to go about their own affairs and to play a role in society at large. Discrimination and persecution of individual Christians and other factors such as local conflicts are also taken into account.

"Seventy-five countries are above the figure of 10 and can thus be considered as places where Christians do not have complete liberty", *"Portes Ouvertes"* said in its survey.

Of the 30 countries at the top of the list published by *Portes Ouvertes*, 24 are predominantly Muslim. Four of the 30 are communist.

Hans Ucko told *ENI*: "This survey [by *Portes Ouvertes*] can conscientise people, but it can also raise the spectre of a cold war between Christians and Muslims. We [the WCC] prefer to keep a dialogue going where we can discuss the concern that people should be able to practise their faith in peace. Polarisation doesn't always help the Christians it sets out to defend."

Ucko said that surveys of this kind were "not unproblematic". It would, for example, be possible to draw up lists showing "how people of other faiths feel uncomfortable in so-called Christian countries". He mentioned Muslims and Jews in Europe and Hindus in Fiji. In some countries in Europe, "Muslims and Jews find their religious dietary laws circumscribed", he said. "In some countries, those targeted by Christian mission can feel threatened," he added.

PRAYER

REV. DR. B.D. PREMSAGAR, Hyderabad

Everyone knows the importance of prayer but it is good to remind ourselves time and again about our understanding of prayer and practice of it.

It gives me an opportunity to deal at least a few aspects of Christian faith and life. The Church today definitely needs them to keep itself alive for many factors for Church's Growth, development and solving its many a problems through prayer. That is why we say that the prayer can change things and wrought things. Prayer is like a live wire and is the very breath of life for the church. The Church which does not pray is a dead church. This can be expanded in more detailed manner.

1. What is Prayer? According to the Oxford Dictionary Prayer is defined as "A personal communication or petition addressed to a diety". It indicates personal dealing with a personal God. That suggests a personal relationship between God and man his conversation or even arguments. Gen. 18:23 ff., Ex. 32:7ff. whereas the dictionary of the Bible gives altogether a different connotation of the meaning of prayer. "..... Prayer is worship that includes all the attitudes of the human spirit in its approach to God". Therefore the very Christian worship of God includes ADORATION, CONFESSION, PRAISE etc. Hence I conclude by saying that "THE DOCTRINE OF PRAYER EMPHASISES THE CHARACTER OF GOD, THE NECESSITY OF MAN'S BEING IN SAVING AND COVENANT RELATION WITH HIM AND HIS ENTERING FULLY INTO ALL THE PRIVILEGES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THAT RELATION WITH GOD". From this we understand that God as being active in the history of humanity. This can be seen clearly in the person of Christ who was very active performing acts of Power as found in St. Mk. 1:35 ff. Throughout his ministry Jesus was doing good to people by his service. JESUS spent much of his time in Prayer, eg: He prayed before going to the Cross, even on the Cross while being crucified. It was from this practice of Prayer that He derived His strength necessary for His demanding role. Whenever there was crisis during His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ prayed to God. eg. He overcame the temptations in the beginning of his ministry Lk. 4:1-13; While appointing the Twelve Disciples Lk. 6:12, for the Church Jn. 17:1-25, at the end in the garden of Gethsemane Mk. 14:32-35.

It is to be understood that Christ followed God's way and his will but not according to worldly standards. When people wanted to make Him their king for their selfish needs and ends JESUS refused to accept their wishes. In this context the Church as a whole should ponder over its own standing in its life, witness and ministry today. This gives us an opportunity to think and think and have an introspection of our life and work.

Is the Church today able to tackle its problems in the areas of Pastoral life and administrative setup? It is the right time for the Church to watch its own life., as body of Christ. Now there is urgency for the Church to spend time in prayerful life and recast its plans, programmes and projects. Today the Church needs unceasing and fervent prayers in tackling its own problems.

In the light of the above how much time and priority is given by the Church for this important aspect of prayer? How much time an individual's family, congregations and Dioceses in Church of South India as a corporate body of Christ is finding place for prayer? My own Pastoral Ministry is an encouragement for me to face boldly the crises at different junctures and that itself is a witness of Prayer Dynamism.

2. The second step of Prayerful life is to WAIT and WATCH. This is yet another important character of Church's life i.e. to *wait and watch*, as we find in St. Mk. 14:34. The time brings with it many rapid changes as such the Church needs to keep abreast with the changing times and situations. The Church exists in the world and the Church should work to accomplish, to establish the kingdom of God, which comes at the time of *Escaton*. That is why Jesus Christ clearly commands his disciples to *WATCH and PRAY* before His Arrest, and also after his RESURRECTION and before his ascension. JESUS said "DO NOT LEAVE JERUSALEM, BUT WAIT FOR THE GIFT MY FATHER PROMISED....." Acts 1:49. Accordingly there was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the whole faith of the Church has undergone a radical change and transformation. It is to be seen that the early church began to proclaim the Cosmic Christ by "CONTINUING STEADFASTLY IN APOSTLES DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP, AND IN

BREAKING OF BREAD, AND IN PRAYERS", Acts. 2:42. This infact gave them courage and boldness to witness the CHRIST RESURRECTED. This they started with a big bang to proclaim the GOSPEL, and as a result many were added to the Church Acts. 2:47. Thus the Church had spread rapidly and widely and grown from strength to strength. This change in the life of the church has upset the calculations of Roman Rulers. Where does the Church stand today in its role and witness of God's saving act of Christ on the Cross. Is it not the time for the church to wait and watch in its experience and witness? The time is ripe to gain this experience by the church today by receiving the gift of HOLY SPIRIT, BY WATING upon the LORD and Watching the changing scenarious in the life of the Church. The consequences will be adverse for the Church and its existence if this experience is not gained. The church exists to its members and to those who do not belong to it and to the whole world. The Church cannot exist merely as an organisation for name sake, but it should be productive and with Resurrected experience. Thus it can become a leaven, light and salt to the world, then only it can boast of itself as a living organism. JESUS CHRIST himself while being transfigured

had shown the best example of how and what change it could bring about. JESUS saw the pathetic life of his disciples at this event. The disciples "WERE SLEEPY BUT THEY BECAME AWAKE AND THEY SAW HIS GLORY...." Lk. 9:32. Could this same experience happen in the life of the church to radiate the Glory of God in its call, commitment and purpose in this world today? The Church cannot be sleepy and complacent and Lethargic by being in slumber but should awake with potentiality to meet its demands. This we can learn from the life experience of St. Paul, a great missionary of all times. St Paul speaks through his own experience how he was used by God for the spread of the Gospel and finally became a martyr for Christs sake and also for the task of the Church in this world.

St. Paul says, "I want to know Christ and power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death is found in Phil. 3:6ff. Thus the church is for the whole cosmic world with a definite plan and purpose of God to fulfil in the history of mankind. This can bring and establish the kingdom of God on earth.

THE BIBLE SOCIETY OF INDIA

Invites applications from dynamic result oriented and enterprising persons committed to the Bible cause for the post of Auxiliary Secretary for the Tamilnadu Auxiliary with its Office at Madras. The applicant should be a University Graduate with administrative experience. Diploma or degree in Theology will be an added qualification. Candidates should be between 35 and 50 years of age and should be fluent in Tamil and English. Age and/or qualification may be relaxed in deserving cases. Extensive tour of the entire area would be involved. Those with experience in distribution of Scriptures will be preferred. This post is in the salary scale of Rs. 1950-90-2850-110-4500 (Grade II). Those called for interview from outstations will be eligible for first class train fare from the nearest railway station to the place of interview and back, by the shortest route, plus 10% of the fare towards incidentals.

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Women, Child and Environment

MRS. MARY KHEMCHAND, *New Delhi**

Women are said to hold up half of the world. In India this is not so because the gender ratio has been declining steadily. Today there are 950 women for every 1000 men. In China it is even worse. The reason being that girl babies are being aborted in the mistaken notion that sons will look after their parents in old age and will carry on the family name.

In actual fact, women though a minority, are the real producers and farmers of the world. They grow the crops, tend the animals, bring the water. Yet international agencies and govts. have everywhere ignored the vital part women play in caring for the environment. Their voice, like their knowledge and experience, is simply not heard.

In industrialised countries, women have greatly contributed to making the environment a central issue. Since the 1970s, women's groups and organisations have been very active in promoting environmental awareness, education and protection. Women make up a large part of Europe's Green parties, both as members and party leaders.

All over the world, women play a crucial role in environmental management. As farmers, stock breeders and suppliers of fuel and water, they interact most closely with the environment. They are the managers and often the preservers of natural resources.

Women affect the environment as farmers. They constitute a large share if not the majority of farmers in the developing world. Worldwide, women produce 50% of food and in Africa they account for 80%, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation.

In many developing countries, men migrate to the cities in search of jobs, leaving women in charge of the farms. As many as one-third of rural households are headed by women, according to an FAO study. Thus women are taking decisions on production, land use, fertilizers and pesticides that affect the environment in many ways.

Women are equally important in water management. As farmers they are the primary users of water in agriculture. In rural areas, women are also the main

collectors and users of water for their households. They are immediately affected by degraded water systems and have a vital interest in water quality. Their role in watershed protection and in water quality is the key to water ecological systems. The same is true in the management of trees and forests. In many societies, women are responsible for the care and maintenance of trees. They are also the main gatherers of fuelwood for heating and cooking. For women, forests are an important resource in many ways. They provide fodder, medicinal plants, wild fruits, and material for baskets, mat ropes and fences. As major users of forests, women are well aware of their value and of the need to limit exploration to allow forest regeneration.

India's Chipko movement is a prime example of women acting to prevent destruction of their resources. In 1973, angered by the selling of their trees to a timber company, women of Uttar Pradesh State protected them through non-violent action: as the company prepared to cut trees near their villages, the women rushed to the woods hugged the trees, protecting them with their bodies, chipko has since become a major environmental force. Today Chipko's women plant trees, build soil retainer walls and draw up village forest plans.

All over the world, women's organisations are promoting environmental awareness education and management. In many countries they were the first to lead the protest against chemical, water and air pollution. Women are more vulnerable than men to environmental pollution because of their child bearing role. Many reports have linked reproductive defects to contaminants such as lead. The possible effects of exposure to chemicals range from infertility, miscarriage, neonatal death and malformation, to growth retardation.

Recognising the role of women in protecting the environment, the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 decided to consider Women's contributions to sustainable development as one of the central issues of the conference.

* Mrs. Mary Khemchand is the President of the National YWCA

Inter-Church Service Association (ICSA)

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

In the Service of God and His People

PROF. D. YESUDHAS, *Director*

Today, as ICSA marks the completion of twenty-five years of service, its original function — the providing of financial and property-holding services to related Churches working in India — though still very important, is dwarfed by the many other areas of service it has taken up over the years, as it strives to meet the ever-changing, ever-growing needs of the society around it.

What has distinguished ICSA from the onset is its openness — its ability to change, to adapt, to spot a need and try to meet it, to take that 'leap of faith' again and again, changing and growing as people and their needs change and grow. ICSA is not an end in itself, a structure to be maintained for its own sake. Rather, ICSA exists to serve 'The other' — be it a farmer in need of appropriate technology, a couple seeking marital counselling, a disabled person aspiring for economic self-reliance, a drug addict seeking healing, a patient needing reasonably priced medication, or — perhaps most important of all — an inspired individual seeking training in communication, counselling, or rural development. And, of course, 'The other' continues to comprise Churches and Mission Agencies in need of expert accounting services, financial advice and the means of monitoring programmes and projects.

ICSA has been alive to the challenges and demands of the world outside and responded by promoting an Educational Trust, the Educational and Development Services, India (EDSI) in 1985 to widen its Programme of Education and Extension, and a Public Charitable Trust, the Comprehensive Medical Services, India (CMSI) in 1988 to manufacture and supply essential and life-saving drugs at 'low cost' for voluntary health-work.

PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

THE JIVANA PRABHA COUNSELLING CENTRE offers training in Counselling and Effective Communication, in addition to rendering counselling and psychotherapeutic services to individuals and families.

THE JIVANA JYOTI PROGRAMME OF TRAINING AND REHABILITATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES has evolved programmes suited for rural as well as the urban Disabled. The two Computer, training

Centres with special facilities for the Disabled, one situated in the ICSA premises in Madras and the other at the American College campus in Madurai, serve the training needs of young disabled people who cannot avail themselves of the training facilities in institutions for normal people.

The Community-based Rehabilitation Programme carried on in the Morappur and Nallampalli Blocks of Dharmapuri District, Tamil Nadu, has developed into a model programme which can be duplicated by other agencies involved in the training and rehabilitation of disabled people in futuristic skills, including assembly, maintenance and repair of Electrical, Electronic and Communication gadgets.

THE CMSI ESSENTIAL DRUGS PROJECT is an expression of Christian concern for the health and wholeness of all human-kind, with a bias towards the weaker section of society. Essential and life-saving drugs commonly used in primary health care are being manufactured and made available at cost price to voluntary health agencies involved in community health, spread all over the country.

THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY NEEDS AND CONCERNS UNIT works for the uplift of the marginalized people in Partnership with the Church at various levels. A Project is promoted to be carried on either by the Congregation or the Diocese on the basis of partnership between ICSA and the Congregation/Diocese concerned. ICSA provides the necessary professional service and finds the seed-capital in special cases, and the church provides the personnel and other resources.

Rural and Urban-Slum Development Training Programme forms an integral part of the community around us. The main thrust of the programme is awareness-education, leadership-training, community-organization, and the imparting of job-oriented skills-training for self-employment. There are also other programmes initiated by the Women's Desk to cater to the special needs of women and children.

Extension Services in Appropriate Technology seeks to bring to small farmers and agricultural labourers in far-away village communities the latest developments in intermediate technology which are of immediate practical use to them. Proven labour-saving devices and fuel-saving

gadgets which can be inexpensively fabricated and used in the essential activities of their every day life are designed, making use of domestic raw materials and expertise locally available.

THE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES UNIT seeks to help the Indian Church in its various socio-economic and rural development programmes, often undertaking extensive studies on the feasibility and utility of proposed projects, and in special cases, securing aid for these projects through banks, government agencies, or other funding agencies. The services of the unit are also available to over-seas funding agencies for monitoring Development Programmes and Projects.

STUDY PROGRAMME offers to students and visitors from over-seas, Orientation Programmes of long and short durations and plunge-in experiences. Students from some of the North American Colleges participate in the programme on a regular basis in fulfilment of their international/off-Campus Studies Semester requirement. Introduction to the rich religious, cultural and literacy heritage of the country, and choice of independent study/internship experiences in areas of special interests — ranging from 'rural health' to 'mountain ecology' — from part of the curriculum.

RELIEF AND REHABILITATION SERVICES have been carried on among the Sri Lankan refugees since 1983, and an infrastructure has been built up which will be able to step into relief operations in emergencies.

THE PROGRAMME CENTRE located at the ICSA Centre, provides facilities for holding conferences, seminars, workshops, training programmes and the like, in an atmosphere congenial for such exercises, at a moderate cost. The Guest-House attached to the Centre offers clean, comfortable — but inexpensive — lodging to members and friends.

THE FINANCE AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT UNIT acts as Treasurer/Manager/Accountant for Churches/Missions and Church-related Organizations. The Unit also seeks to help in setting up sound accounting systems in accordance with the specific needs of the Church/institution concerned, and train the staff to work the system. In addition, ICSA also holds property on trust for religious and charitable objects.

ICSA is not a funding agency, nor is it sustained by grants from any source, but on the basis of self-supporting programmes. Its specialized services are priced and are available to all Churches and Church related institutions, and other voluntary organisations without any denominational or regional considerations.

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Academy of Christian Education — A Report

MS. OSWIN ARUN GOPAL, *Madras*

The Christian Education Department of the C.S.I. Synod launched its summer institute at Kodaikanal, in the precincts of Methodist Hill. The programme commenced on the 14th May, 1995 with lunch and registration. The burden of the academy was to produce a cadre of trainers for diocesan Christian Education Ministries, with expertise, skills and leadership qualities.

Representatives from all parts of C.S.I. including Jaffna Diocese contributed to the strength of this programme. The excitement was enriched by the presence of the delegates of C.N.I. This involvement is the first of its kind. Refugees from the scorching heat in their places found Kodi, the venue, "heaven come down".

The keynote address at the inaugural service was delivered by the Rt. Rev. Dr. David Pothirajulu. In his address the Bishop shared three perspectives from the Bible which point to the mission of God namely cosmic, pluralistic and Shalom. Engineer Jayachandran, representing the Kodi community, welcomed the gathering. He provided a comprehensive account of the Hill-station and distributed Eucalyptus oil bottles as souvenirs.

From the 15th the Academy proceeded with full vigour. The sessions were conducted under the umbrella of a thatched roof. The feeling of being inside a giant hut was experienced. The setting was apt to study the impoverished state of the Sunday School. The greenery surrounding this shelter helped the members to harmonize with environment. Eminent resource persons shared their ideas on prominent issues concerning Sunday School Ministry. They include:

Dr. Immanuel Prabhakar & Team (Ministry to the Differently Abled)

Dr. B.J. Prashantham & Mrs. Meena Prashantham (Counselling and Group Dynamics)

Rev. Dr. Arun Gopal (Context and Processes of Faith Formation)

Rev. Dr. James Srinivasan (Adult Christian Education and Corporate Learning)

Rev. Hannibal Cabrol (Communication in Christian Education)

Rev. B.D. Prasada Rao (History of Sunday School Movement and Curriculum Building)

Rev. Robinson Levi & Team (Praxis Method in Doing Christian Education)

The absence of Dr. Dayanandan and Mrs. Anne Dayanandan of Madras Christian College, Tambaram at this academy was regretted. But, their manuscripts of the place of Ecological Concerns in Christian Education were much appreciated. Though the climate was successful in refrigeration the brawn of the participants, sizzling talks helped to warm up their spirits.

The speakers helped to disrobe many facts which lay hitherto camouflaged. The Bible Studies led by Rt. Rev. Dr. S. Jebanesan (Bishop in Jaffna) and Rt. Rev. Dr. P.G. Kuruvilla (Bishop in North Kerala) together with the morning and evening devotions strengthened the haleness of the academy.

The Officers of the Synod graced the academy one evening. The Moderator Most Rev. Dr. V.P. Dandin in his message to the participants shed light on re-reading the Bible and eradication of Biblical illiteracy. His ideas were thought-provoking. The General Secretary Prof. George Koshy and the Treasurer Mr. Frederick Williams also addressed the gathering.

The sight-seeing tour around Kodi and the boat-ride around the lake confirmed the title "the Switzerland of the East". The ferry across the lake, helped participants to maintain contact with boat and water. The 18th night saw active display of talents as the members, involved themselves in the cultural programme. The buzz, hum, purr, whine and whistle of this part of the programme encouraged the participants to take to each other. The warmth of the bonfire kept the spirit of entertainment alive. Young and enthusiastic co-ordinators (Oswin Arun Gopal, Jeba Pothirajulu, Becky Srinivasan, Naveen, and Shameen Prashantham) helped to maintain rapport.

The last day of the academy (20th of May 1995) was observed with solemnity. The members gathered around the map of India, which was made with flowers and leaves on the ground; symbolising unity amidst diversity in India. After devotions, certificates were distributed by the Chairman of the Christian Education Department Bishop P.G. Kuruvilla with the help of the Director Rev. Dr. Arun Gopal, who in his concluding remarks thanked the E.M.W., Germany, specially the Rev. Werner Gebert for sponsoring the Academy of Christian Education.

The academy was a tour de force due to healthy participation and co-operation rendered by all involved in the programme. Though the excitement was evanescent, representatives returned to their places of work with a new vision "To Nurture God's People for Christian Service", which is the motto of the Christian Education Department.

NEWS FROM THE DIOCESES

KRISHNA & GODAVARI

GOOD NEWS MEETINGS

The Gospel message has a transforming power. This is being tested over the centuries and people all over the world witness to this power. The message also releases people from tension and anxiety which, more often than not, are responsible for physical ailments. This is what was experienced by people at the good news meetings organised by the Krishna Godavari Diocese, with the cooperation of the other denominations, at Vijayawada on 24 to 28 May.

Braving the hot sun where the thermometer was touching 44°C, people were milling around the two places — Bishop Azariah Girls High School compound and the PWD grounds where the meetings were held. A moderate estimate of the people who attended the meetings will be more than 2,00,000 — a mammoth crowd which Vijayawada has never witnessed.

Brother D.G.S. Dinakaran, his wife Mrs. Stella Dinakaran and their son Brother Paul, the Jesus Calls Ministries of Madras, were the speakers. Mr. Shantha Vardhan and Brother Raju were the interpreters. **YOUR SORROW WILL TURN INTO JOY.** Jn. 16,20. was the theme.

Bishop T.B.D. Prakasarao who was the Chairman of the meetings presided over the meetings. Mrs. Krupa Veni Prakasarao also chaired the meeting when Mrs. Stella addressed the gathering.

Mr. K.G. Sekhar who was the General Convenor of the campaign deserves a special mention. He had a good team of workers but much of the work was done by him. He left no stone unturned to make the historic event a grand success. Campaign of that nature requires huge amounts. More than fifty per cent of the expenses was borne by the local congregations of the Diocese. This is something unique. Being the Secretary of the diocese, Mr. Sekhar and the Bishop who is the Chairman of the VELCOM, Rev. G. Rajaratnam, the Treasurer of the diocese, incidentally, he was the director of the choir of about 100 singers, formed into a good team and did their best to see that the meetings were organised without any flaw. Mr. T.S. Thyagarajun was the Treasurer who controlled the financial affairs. Rev. Chandra Bose was the co-convenor who played an important role.

The Word of God was well received. A number of people who were sick in mind, who had no peace, who were suffering mentally and bodily were healed. Hundreds of people, mostly people of other faiths, got on to the stage and gave their witness of their new experience and the power of healing they received in the name of Jesus Christ.

People in Vijayawada, and in the nearby towns and villages will remember this great event for a long time.

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(Or)

Serving as Selection Grade Lecturer or Reader in any Degree College, with at least 55% marks in M.A./M.Sc. with teaching experience of not less than 16 years authenticated Administrative experience of at least 5 years in any Academic Institution.

'Jerusalem is not a pie to be cut into pieces'

By Martin Bailey

Jerusalem, 25 April (ENI) — Christian and Muslim leaders meeting in Jerusalem have sharply criticised Israeli policies on Jerusalem, including restrictions on the movement of Christians and Muslims in the city. The leaders agreed that the future of Jerusalem is central to the success of the peace process.

"Jerusalem is not a pie that can be cut up into pieces", Hanan Ashrawi, former spokesperson for the official Palestinian negotiating team, said. "Jerusalem is a place for harmony — and harmony requires pluralism," she told a Christian-Muslim study group sponsored by Al-Liqa, the Centre for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land.

"God must have intended that Jerusalem be a model of pluralism," she said. "That's why God made Jerusalem the holy city for Jews, Muslims and Christians."

Her views were echoed by both Christian and Islamic leaders. Archbishop Lutfi Laham, patriarchal vicar in Jerusalem of the Greek Catholic Church, said that members of his church had been unable to reach their cathedral because of the "complete closure" imposed by Israeli military officials during Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter.

"We must say that the Jewish contempt for Christians and Muslims, the contrived 'judaisation' of Jerusalem as an on-going fact, and the building of illegal settlements in and around Jerusalem — these things are not in the service of the peace process, but are rather aborting this process," he told the academic symposium that included representatives of several embassies accredited to Israel and of non-governmental agencies involved in development work in the region.

Thiab Ayoush, under-secretary of the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs, commented that "the archbishop speaks for Muslims as well as Christians".

The study day was held in the Roman Catholic Centre of Notre Dame during the Eastern Orthodox Holy Week which this year coincided with Passover celebrations. Israeli officials had enforced the closure of the West Bank (except for Jerusalem) and the Autonomous Areas of Gaza and Jericho. Israelis had announced the closure to ensure that there was no outbreak of violence during Passover.

The President of Al Quds Islamic University, Sari Nuseibah, proposed at the meeting that Jerusalem should remain an undivided city but could serve as the capitals of both Israel and Palestine. He and Ashrawi referred to United Nations resolutions that affirm Jerusalem as "corpus separatus," a separate body.

But, Nuseibah said, Palestinians were prepared to negotiate on territorial borders as long as the world recognised that Jerusalem belonged to no single party. "Jerusalem must be a bi-national city," he said.

Rafiq Khoury, of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, said that Christians were concerned not only for religious freedom but also for justice and human rights. Describing his "personal and intimate" relationship with Jerusalem which began in his youth, he said: "It was 'the City' for my family and me, not only a city of pilgrimage during Holy Week, but the city where we bought tomatoes."

Now, he said, he was not free to move between his parish and his office in the Patriarchate, without special permission. Permission sometimes took days to arrange. — (ENI)

NEWS FROM ALL OVER

Christian leader questions Israel's good will on Jerusalem

Geneva, 24 May (ENI) — World Council of Churches' officials have raised profound doubts about the capacity and willingness of the Israeli government and of the United Nations to ensure a peaceful and just future for Jerusalem.

"The Israeli government considers Jerusalem the eternal capital of Israel and does not consider there is anything to be negotiated about Jerusalem," said Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the WCC, who led a WCC delegation to the city in May to meet religious and political leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian National Authority.

"We do not accept that position," Raiser told a press conference in Geneva. He said that it was "an absolute illusion" for the international community to believe that peace negotiations in "good will" were in place which would ensure a negotiated settlement for the future of Jerusalem.

Dwain Epps, coordinator of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and a member of the delegation to Jerusalem, also said that while it had been accepted by many that the best solution for Jerusalem would be an "internationalisation" of the city with guarantees from the United Nations, there was growing disillusion about "the capacity of the UN to provide effective guarantees".

"We have generally argued the case that the future of Jerusalem needs to be a matter for international negotiation, within the framework of the United Nations," Epps said. "That position does not change."

"We were caused to reflect somewhat as a result of our conversations with Christian leaders, who were speaking of the need to retain the status quo as it affects the particular juridical positions of the Holy Places."

Epps said that the church leaders in Jerusalem wanted "a special status for Jerusalem to be negotiated by the Israeli government and the Palestinian National Authority in consultation with religious leaders in Jerusalem".

The questioned, he said, the degree to which the United Nations should be the "exclusive instrument" through which international guarantees should take place. The church leaders had pointed to the inability of the United Nations to obtain compliance with a series of resolutions since 1967.

Other formulations which would involve the UN but not see the UN as the sole instrument of guarantees should be provided, Epps said. He pointed out that the WCC's main concern was with the people of the region.

Raiser also told the press conference that the church leaders he met in Jerusalem were anxious about the future of the Christian community in the city.

The church leaders were concerned that the city could become a city where there were "only holy places, but no Christian community". It was obvious, Raiser said, that massive mobilisation — spiritual, moral, political and material — was needed among the international community to support Christians in the region, in the same way that Jewish and Muslim communities in the region and support from their international networks.

According to the WCC, the Christian population of Jerusalem and the region has declined considerably during the past 30 years. Today, Christians have been reduced to 2.3 per cent of the population of the West Bank and Gaza.

At the same time, Raiser said, Christian leaders in the region realised that as a minority community Christians had a particular calling to "keep an open space for encounter" and for standing against "exclusive claims" to Jerusalem.

WCC PUBLICATIONS

NEW AND FORTHCOMING RESOURCES FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

January 1995-June 1995

Hugh McCullum

THE ANGELS HAVE LEFT US

The Rwanda tragedy and the churches

With a foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

'We will never come back to this church. It is a graveyard. The angels have left us.' Those heart-rending words come from a 16-year-old Rwandese woman who managed to survive one of the massacres that decimated her country in 1994. Her voice is among the many that speak in this vivid and disturbing account of one of the most horrifying episodes of our violent age. Based on hundreds of interviews in Rwanda and elsewhere with government, military and United Nations officials, pastors and church leaders, survivors, refugees and displaced people, this book focuses on the part played in these events by churches in Rwanda, throughout Africa and around the world. The author analyzes the roots of the tragedy, looks at the future of a shattered church in a shattered country and poses hard questions about what the church and the ecumenical family should do in a world where poverty, oppression and hatred are creating many potential Rwandas.

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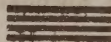
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